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SUBJECT: NIGER: GON EXPANDS HIGHER ED TO NIGER'S INTERIOR

¶1. SUMMARY: On October 28-30, 2008 the GON opened three new University Institutes of Technology (IUTs) in the interior cities of Zinder, Maradi, and Tahoua. This represents the largest expansion of the national university system since 1985. According to GON officials, the purpose of the IUTs is to expand higher education opportunities for students outside of Niamey. IUTs currently offer limited, targeted courses of study.

History of Higher Education in Niger

¶2. The Centre d'Enseignement Supérieur (CES), established in Niamey in 1971, was Niger's first public institution of higher education, and was officially designated as the National University in 1973. In 1985, the public higher education system underwent an expansion with several existing post secondary and vocational institutions being subsumed as schools within the university. In 1993, the university was renamed Abdou Moumouni University (AMU), in honor of professor and university rector Abdou Moumouni Dioffo, a famous Nigerien educator, intellectual, and solar energy expert.

Current State of Affairs

¶3. Between 1990-2006, the reputation and quality of education at AMU declined significantly, due in large part to over-enrollment, underfunding, and debilitating student strikes, which led to the cancellation of several academic years. Over the past two academic years, the situation has improved with newly elected university officials striving to improve faculty and student working conditions, and standing firm in the face of unrealistic student demands.

Enrollment

¶4. Student enrollments increased significantly between 1971-1973, with Nigerien high school graduates no longer obligated to seek opportunities elsewhere the sub-region to begin their university studies. To date, there are approximately 10,000 students enrolled at AMU.

Governance and Administration

¶5. The university rector is elected by the faculty, student representatives, and administrative staff representatives for a three-year renewable term. An elected vice-rector assists the president in managing the university's affairs. Deans act as chairs for the schools through a one-time renewable term of three years. In the absence of vice-deans, department heads and their faculty assist the deans in their duties. Heads of departments are elected by their peers for a two-year once-renewable term.

Research and Publication

¶ 16. Research and publication are not well supported at UAM, although research professors, in collaboration with outside partners, attempt to establish working teams to conduct original research. Research professor teams are active in the Agronomy School and the School of Health Sciences. Until recently, the lack of an electronic communication network through which research results could be disseminated had been a daunting problem; however, AMU is taking steps to modernize their communications infrastructure and capability. They recently signed a contract to establish Internet access, which is now available to most faculty members, and have provided laptop computers to all university lecturers.

Privatization?

¶ 17. Privatization is not currently part of AMU's plan for improvement and expansion. The university community has debated the possibility of "non-public" means of funding, but without making specific reference to privatization. A "reflection committee" has been established to brainstorm on new ways to tap into non-public funding sources on behalf of the university.

IUT Launch

¶ 18. On October 28, 2008, Minister of Secondary and Higher Education

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Sidikou Oumarou presided over the official opening ceremony of the University Institute of Technology (IUT) in Zinder. IUT Zinder will initially offer two courses of study: regional planning and administration. IUT Maradi opened the following day with academic programs in electrical and civil engineering. Tahoua's IUT opened on October 30 and will offer courses of study in banking and finance, accounting, and business management. In the near future, IUT Tahoua is considering adding courses on hotel management and tourism. According to GON officials, the institutes were created as an investment in human capital to create and empower a well-trained, modern workforce with the skills necessary to improve and expand economic development in Niger. In addition, the IUTs will provide higher education opportunities for students outside of the capital.

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